United Nations A/52/425

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 October 1997

Original: English

Fifty-second session
Agenda item 97 (a)

Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international economic cooperation for development through partnership

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 51/174 of 16 December 1996, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its fifty-second session, a report on the implementation of the resolution, including further recommendations for enhancing the dialogue and an assessment of the ongoing efforts for its strengthening, such as the outcome of the discussions in the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly on an Agenda for Development, possible future themes for dialogue, and proposals to convene special sessions of the Assembly on major issues relevant to the dialogue on international economic cooperation for development, including those identified in the Agenda for Development.

2. By the same resolution, the Assembly agreed to defer the holding of the high-level dialogue for a period of two days until its fifty-second session — the date, modalities and focus of the discussion to be decided by the President of the General Assembly through consultations with Member States, taking into account the progress and results achieved in the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on the theme of the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications.

Assessment of ongoing efforts

3. Since the submission of previous reports by the Secretary-General (A/49/542, A/50/480 and A/51/485), the need to promote a dialogue to strengthen international economic cooperation has been reiterated in various intergovernmental bodies, including the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the General Assembly on an Agenda for Development which concluded its work with the adoption by the Assembly of the Agenda for Development on 20 June 1997 (resolution 51/240).

4. Building on the outcome of recent United Nations conferences and other relevant agreements, the Agenda for Development is aimed at invigorating a renewed and strengthened partnership for development, based on the imperatives of mutual benefits and genuine interdependence. It testifies to the renewed commitments of all countries to mobilize national and international efforts in pursuit of sustainable development and to revitalize and strengthen international cooperation for development.[1]

5. The Agenda for Development notes that globalization and interdependence are deepening the need and creating greater opportunities for international cooperation. The problems and questions which globalization and interdependence bring in their wake, show that there clearly

97-26380 (E) 151097 171097

exists a shared, common interest among all countries in solving and answering them. International development cooperation, not only founded in solidarity, but also based on mutual interest and partnership, forms an essential part of this effort. The Agenda for Development manifests the commitment of the international community to grasp the opportunity which has arisen with the waning of ideological confrontations, the rise in globalization, and the deepening of interdependence among nations, for constructive dialogue among all countries, in particular among the developed and developing countries, and political mobilization for the promotion of international cooperation for development based on genuine partnership and mutuality of interests and benefits.[2]

6. The Agenda for Development notes that an encouraging development in recent years has been the almost universal pursuit of increased economic openness and integration, which has contributed to a growing economic and social interdependence among countries, and that a primary objective of its implementation should be to contribute in such a way that the benefits stemming from future growth and development are distributed equitably among all countries and peoples.[3] The Agenda also notes that achieving and maintaining an international environment favourable to all countries is in the interest of all countries.[4] In this regard, the Economic and Social Council, at its 1997 high-level segment addressed the theme "Fostering an enabling environment for development: financial flows, including capital flows, investment and trade". It underscored the need for strengthened international cooperation to enhance the benefits and mitigate the risks associated with globalization.

7. Finally, the Agenda for Development recognizes the renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international cooperation through partnership as an important mechanism through which the intergovernmental follow-up and assessment of the Agenda and its implementation would be conducted, and that such dialogue should also be used as an opportunity to discuss new and emerging issues concerning international cooperation for development.[5]

II. Possible future themes for dialogue

8. The Assembly, in its resolution 50/122 of 20 December 1995, reaffirmed that such a dialogue should be conducted in response to the imperatives of mutual interests and benefits, genuine interdependence, shared responsibility and the partnership for achieving sustained economic growth and sustainable development as well as improving the international economic environment that is conducive to such development.

9. The Secretary-General had, in his previous report (A/50/480), suggested that themes be selected in the light of the principal objectives of the dialogue; that is, to promote broader and deeper understanding of issues of a global or transboundary nature that cut across individual, regional or group interests. The setting, the objectives and the policy framework of the Agenda for Development provide the overall context within which the themes for the dialogue could be chosen. The specific themes to be selected should, however, be such as to engage the attention of policy makers at a high level, generate interest among other actors in development and result in stimulating and productive discussions. It would also be preferable to select themes that are at the cutting-edge of international economic relations for the dialogue to serve as a means of expanding the frontiers of international cooperation.

10. A number of possible themes were recommended in the above-mentioned report to indicate the kind of topics that could be usefully discussed. These included: globalization and the rules of game; competition; regional integration and the global economy; new information technologies and the global economy; international migration; prevention and management of emergencies and post-conflict peace-building; and crime, drugs, violence and global stability. By its resolution 50/122, the Assembly decided that the theme for the first high-level dialogue would be the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications. Building on the previous proposals and taking into account subsequent developments, possible themes are suggested below.

A. Development finance

11. The Agenda for Development has called for a strong political commitment by the international community to strengthen international cooperation for development and noted that the mobilization of domestic and international financial resources for development from all sources was an essential component for the comprehensive and effective implementation of the Agenda.[6] In addition, it called for consideration to be given to modalities for conducting an intergovernmental dialogue on the financing of development, taking into account the recommendation by the Secretary-General.[7] Furthermore, the Secretary-General, in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform", proposes to focus the debate in the General Assembly by means of a special high-level one-week segment, the first of which could be devoted to the issue of

international financing for development (A/51/950, para. 41).

12. While private capital flows have increased significantly, official development assistance (ODA), which remains an essential source of external funding, continues to decline. Reaffirmation of commitments to fulfil as soon as possible the agreed United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) for overall ODA has been repeated in various forums. Also, the implementation of conference goals requires enormous financial resources, including external assistance. The dialogue may provide an opportunity to identify mutual interests and to discuss possible solutions at a high political level.

13. The dialogue could build on the work of, *inter alia*, the Committee for Development Planning, which in 1997 examined the development policy challenges arising from the globalization of finance and investment.[8] Recognizing that financial globalization offered new opportunities, the Committee also noted that it presented risks of financial instability, and that only a small number of developing countries currently had the human resources and institutional capacity to take effective advantage of the new opportunities. The Committee concluded that most developing countries would need continued and expanded international financial resources to meet the needs for investment capital, foreign exchange and human development priorities over at least 10 years to enable them to benefit from globalization and generate sustained growth.

B. Strengthening the means for development cooperation, including South-South cooperation

14. The Agenda for Development recognized the importance of various forms of development cooperation, such as South-South cooperation, regional economic integration and cooperation and the increasing role of civil society. The Agenda for Development noted South-South cooperation as an integral and dynamic part of international development cooperation and mentioned that the concept of triangular cooperation, which involves, *inter alia*, technical, financial and other support by developed countries and international organizations for South-South cooperation, could make a significant contribution to the promotion of cooperation among developing countries. The Agenda for Development also noted that regional economic integration and cooperation was increasingly recognized as a means towards expanding trade and investment opportunities, and for promoting economic growth and other forms of cooperation between countries of various regions.[9]

15. The dialogue should provide an opportunity to review the effectiveness of various forms of development cooperation and explore ways to ensure complementarity and create synergy between bilateral and multilateral cooperation, regional and interregional cooperation, the role of State and non-State actors and any other forms of cooperation, including South-South cooperation.

C. Information technologies and development

16. The Agenda for Development noted that the process of market-driven globalization was an increasingly important change affecting all countries, and that one of the driving forces was the rapid progress in information exchange and telecommunications.[10] The Secretary-General mentioned in his previous report (A/50/480) the accelerated pace of technological advances in the information and communication fields and suggested the need to address issues regarding unequal access to such technologies and the threat of marginalization in the global economy. The convening at Toronto, Canada, from 22 to 25 June 1997, of the World Bank Conference on Knowledge for Development in the Information Age, which was co-hosted by the Government of Canada, reflected the importance of and the interest in this theme.

17. It would be timely to assess the impact of information technology on human development and consider how to effectively incorporate information technology into the development process. Access to communications is essential for countries to participate in global economic activities. By facilitating access to knowledge, information technology can be used to stimulate development and empower the poor. The focus should not only be on new technologies but also on how to maximize the use of existing ones. The dialogue could explore how to structure effective partnerships based on shared mutual interest, discuss policy frameworks to support information technology and address related issues, such as education and training, infrastructure and capacity-building, and the protection of indigenous knowledge.

18. The dialogue could build on the work of the High-Level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, which in 1996 considered how new information technologies that were broadly accessible could contribute to sustainable development by promoting economic growth, improving access to information and promoting civil society.[11] The new

technologies, and related institutional changes such as privatization, offer opportunities to extend services to previously unserved communities and to promote broader participation in development, but may also have economic, social and cultural risks.

D. International migration and development

19. The Agenda for Development mentioned the vital role of the international community in attaining the objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development[12] regarding international migration and development, and suggested that the possibility of convening an international conference on migration and development could be considered.[13] In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 50/123 of 20 December 1995, the item entitled "International migration and development, including the convening of a United Nations conference on international migration and development" will be considered by the Assembly at its current session. International migration and development was the central theme of the thirtieth session of the Commission on Population and Development in 1997.[14] Furthermore, at the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, unemployment and labour migration was proposed as a possible theme for the Council's high-level segment in 1998.

20. As underlined in the Programme of Action, international economic imbalances, poverty and environmental degradation, combined with the absence of peace and security, violations of human rights and the varying degrees of development of judicial and democratic institutions are all factors in the movement of people. The flow of people between and within countries affects the development process in both countries of origin and receiving States. There are both benefits as well as costs to international migration. Among the benefits of international migration are, for example, the provision of technical expertise lacking for receiving countries and the important remittances for sending countries. Development cooperation could play a role in dealing with the fundamental causes of migration and in developing a policy framework to ameliorate its negative effects and support its positive effects.

21. The dialogue could build on the work of the Committee for Development Planning which, in its work programme for 1997-1998, is considering the question of international migration and employment. The Committee will be examining trends and causal factors in international migration, its relation to globalization, the implications of labour migration for sending and receiving countries, and policy options for those countries.

22. The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly in 1999 would be a particularly opportune time to discuss international migration and development, since it is also the year for the quinquennial review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

E. Prevention and management of emergencies and post-conflict peace-building

23. Prevention, preparedness, emergency response, economic recovery and rehabilitation, as the Agenda for Development noted, are all part of a comprehensive response to reduce developing country vulnerability to emergencies; thus far, however, the international community has mostly only been able to react to emergencies through the provision of humanitarian assistance which can only alleviate human suffering in a short-term perspective.[14] As suggested in the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/50/480), it would be in the interest of the international community to prevent emergencies, both natural and man-made, address the immediate and emergency needs, and assist the affected countries in returning to a viable and durable path of development. To this end, close cooperation and coordination by the international community would be essential. The United Nations provides an appropriate forum to discuss this issue since it has the unique mandate to address issues of peace and development in an integrated manner, as noted in the Agenda for Development which also states that the United Nations has a vital role to play in mobilizing the international community to respond in a comprehensive and coordinated way to rehabilitation and reconstruction and for longer-term development needs in connection with humanitarian emergency situations.[15]

F. Uncivil society

24. In the previous report of the Secretary-General, the theme of "crime, drugs, violence and global stability" was proposed. Subsequently, the Agenda for Development underlined the need to address the problems of crime, violence and abuse of and trafficking in drugs.[16] Furthermore, it should be noted that, in pursuance of section IV of its resolution 51/64 of 12 December 1996, the General

Assembly will convene a special session in 1998 in order to consider the fight against the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and related activities, and to promote strategies, methods, practical activities and specific measures to strengthen international cooperation in addressing the problem of illicit drugs. In addition, the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), noted the ominous growth in the activities and influence of terrorists, drug traffickers and those engaged in organizing prostitution and trafficking in women and children — what might be termed the "uncivil society" — and called for new multilateral approaches and new partnerships with non-State actors to contain and reverse those trends. The trends have tended to undermine institutions and destabilize government authority. Consequently, Governments need to develop, through dialogue and cooperation, a strong global response to the activities and influence of an uncivil society.

III. Modalities

25. Taking into account that the Assembly decided to hold a two-day high-level dialogue at its fifty-second session on the theme of the social and economic impact of globalization and interdependence and their policy implications, the following suggestions which build on those made in previous reports on the modalities of the dialogue may be considered:

(a) The issues or themes to be chosen should engage the interest of all groups, be clearly defined, and the interlinkage among them should be taken into account in structuring the dialogue. A gender perspective should be applied to the chosen theme, as recommended in the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women[17] and reiterated by the General Assembly in resolution 50/203 of 22 December 1995, on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference and by the Economic and Social Council in its agreed conclusions on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system;[18]

(b) The theme to be selected for the dialogue should be chosen in a timely manner, preferably at least one year or more in advance in order to allow for adequate preparations. It should be recalled that the General Assembly agreed that the date, modalities and focus of the discussion would be decided by the President of the General Assembly through consultations with Member States, taking into account the progress and results achieved in the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group. Since the Agenda for Development was adopted by the General Assembly on 20 June 1997, it is proposed that a theme be chosen in 1997 for the fifty-third session of the General Assembly;

(c) As regards special sessions and summit-level meetings, the Assembly will convene in June 1998 in special session to consider the fight against the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and related activities. The Assembly also decided, by resolution 50/161 of 22 December 1995, to convene in special session in 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development;[19]

(d) The nature of the outcome of the high-level dialogue should be seen as related to the complexity and maturity of the issues discussed and the outcome should provide for appropriate follow-up by the United Nations, its related institutions and other relevant regional and interregional organizations, as well as other development actors. The nature of the theme discussed should determine the nature of the outcome which should be kept flexible, ranging from a presidential summary or a declaration or statement to agreed conclusions or decisions;

(e) The principle of subsidiarity should be applied in order to ensure that policies are debated at the closest possible level to where problems arise. International and regional organizations should address those issues that must be resolved at the global and regional levels; Governments should address national concerns; and community organizations should deal with intra-community problems;

(f) The preparation for the discussions should not only involve the United Nations and the concerned organizations of the system but actively engage other actors in development and the academic and scientific community. The process of dialogue could involve meetings organized under the auspices of other regional and interregional organizations, the convening of forums by the non-governmental organization community, the organization of hearings, meetings of parliamentarians and the commissioning of studies and expert groups by universities and other academic and public purpose organizations. A public information programme to sensitize and involve major groups in the dialogue should also be prepared and implemented;

(g) Given the nature of the preparatory and related processes and modalities outlined above and the time required to initiate and organize them, as well as the suggestion made in subparagraph (b) above to combine the Secretary-General's proposal for a one-week high-level segment of the General Assembly and the high-level

dialogue, it is recommended that the first such event should be held no earlier than the autumn (northern hemisphere) of 1998.

Notes

[1] See A/AC.250/1 (Part I), annex, para. 2.

[2] Ibid., para. 12

[3] See A/AC.250/1 (Part II), annex, para. 47.

[4] Ibid., para. 48.

[5] See A/AC.250/1 (Part III), annex, para. 283.

[6] Ibid., para. 286.

[7] Ibid., para. 287.

[8] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 15* (E/1997/35).

[9] A/AC.250/1 (Part II), annex, paras. 76, 78 and 79.

[10] A/AC.250/1 (Part I), annex, para. 6.

[11] See E/CN.17/1996/31.

[12] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[13] A/AC.250/1 (Part II), annex, paras. 139 and 140.

[14] Ibid., para. 160.

[15] A/AC.250/1 (Part III), annex, para. 236.

[16] A/AC.250/1 (Part II), annex, para. 108.

[17] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I.

[18] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/52/3/Rev.1), chap. IV.A, agreed conclusions 1997/2.

[19] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I.